

**THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY
AND THE BIRTH OF *IL MANIFESTO*:
LANGUAGES AND CULTURES OF A CONFLICT (1966-1970)**

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The present chapter is all about a major event in the history of the Italian Communist Party (ICP), that is the exit of its leftist wing in 1969 and the birth of a group which was named *il manifesto* after the monthly journal giving voice to the related minority network. The foundation of *il manifesto*, in June 1969, was not authorized by the ICP's leading entities and was the *casus belli* of a conflict that burst out after a long-lasting creeping antagonism between the party establishment and the minority. This contrast revolved around some relevant issues concerning geopolitics, ideology and, most of all, the party's internal democracy, and was subsequent to the death of the general secretary Palmiro Togliatti in 1964, who had assured a solid and unifying leadership until then.

The birth of *il manifesto*, which will become one of the most influential actors of the European Left in the 1970s, is a good representation of the clash between orthodoxy and heterodoxy in the post-1968 ICP, thus marking a watershed in the handling of communist dissidences. With respect to traditional procedural solutions that were mostly based on the punishment of the dissent, the *manifesto affaire* shows an evolution towards a negotiating model, in which the administrative disciplinary treatment of the minority group coexists with informal interactions between the two factions. Actually the final expulsion of the undisciplined militants was the endpoint of a complex and intense debate involving the party as a whole. This dynamic is studied by seeking to decrypt communicational, cultural and ritual aspects of a conflict that stimulated reflections on the very sense of the ICP and its related customs and traditions.

Broadly speaking, dissidences and their handling represent a crucial standpoint to catch the evolving nature of communist political culture, including discourse. Issues related to deviance have been continuously playing a central role in it, for one of the pillars of the communist identity was ‘revolutionary vigilance’. Through this expression introduced in the Bolshevik milieu and then exported worldwide, one indicates the permanent vigilance and self-defense from political enemies that made communist militants a sort of soldiers defending their fortress – their party and, more largely, their ideal and physical spaces of political sociability. In this conflictive vision, the revolutionary vigilance – which also consisted of language control – was designed to address both external enemies and internal alleged friends identified as enemies. All this, even when the seizure of power was accomplished, explains the watchful disciplinary systems implemented by the communist regimes since the Soviet revolution.¹

Under Fascism the Italian Communist Party was largely infiltrated by spies controlled by the regime, whilst the process of bolshevization accomplished by the early 1930s made it an organization strictly modeled on standard rules inspired by Stalin. Those two trends emphasized the party innate culture of suspicion by triggering a series of expulsions that involved prominent personalities such as Angelo Tasca, Amadeo Bordiga, Pietro Tresso, Alfonso Leonetti, and Paolo Ravazzoli. Even Antonio Gramsci, who spent his last years (1926-1937) in Fascist prisons, was criticized because of his heterodox attitude towards the dominant trend of international communism. This is why he experienced troubles with comrades during his detention.²

In the post-WWII period, the fight against dissidence and heterodoxy continued to be a crucial concern for the ICP. The cases of Pietro Secchia, number two of the hierarchy between 1946 and 1954, and of the so-called “magnacucchi”, meaning the local functionaries of the province of Reggio Emilia Aldo Cucchi and Valdo Magnani, are

¹ An analysis of the normative acts related to those aspects in Soviet history is in Giovanni Codevilla, *Dalla rivoluzione bolscevica alla Federazione Russa. Traduzione e commento dei primi atti normativi e dei testi costituzionali* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1996). A sort of guide to revolutionary vigilance against the Tsarist repressive system is Victor Serge, *Les coulisses d'une sûreté générale. Ce que tout révolutionnaire devrait savoir sur la répression* (Paris: Librairie du Travail, 1925).

² See the memories of a communist militant co-detained with Gramsci: Athos Lisa, *Memorie. In carcere con Gramsci. Dall'ergastolo di Santo Stefano alla casa penale di Turi di Bari* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1973), 75. Athos Lisa was also author of a report on Gramsci's condition in prison, which was submitted to the party: Paolo Spriano, *Gramsci in carcere e il partito* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1977), 152. More broadly, on the controversial relation between the ICP and Gramsci during his detention: Silvio Pons, “L'affare Gramsci-Togliatti a Mosca (1938-1941)”, *Studi storici*, 45, 1 (2004): 83-117; *Lettere 1926-1935 tra Gramsci e Tatiana Schucht*, ed. by Aldo Natoli and Chiara Daniele (Torino: Einaudi, 1997); *Gramsci a Roma, Togliatti a Mosca. Il carteggio del 1926*, ed. by Chiara Daniele (Torino: Einaudi, 1999); Angelo Rossi and Giuseppe Vacca, *Gramsci tra Mussolini e Stalin* (Roma: Fazi, 2007); Mauro Canali, *Il tradimento. Gramsci, Togliatti e la verità negata* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2013).

typical products of the Cold War claustrophobic atmospheres before de-Stalinization. Once the armed Soviet intervention in Hungary in October 1956 showed what Moscow was able to do in order to maintain its leadership over the communist world, the ICP substantially approved the repression. This provoked a wave of protest that mostly featured intellectuals, many of them leaving the party in the following months.³

In comparison, the case of *il manifesto* is peculiar as both the set-up of the heterodox front and its political-administrative treatment by the party establishment. On the one hand, the *il manifesto*'s was a collective dissidence including some major militants who had built up longstanding and solid careers in the party's apparatus. This aspect, together with structural factors that will be analyzed further, pushed the ICP's leading authorities to adopt an overall unusual procedure to handle this potentially disruptive dynamics. Rather than the political contents,⁴ it is the formal profile of this phenomenon, including its communicational implications, that is at the core of the present essay.

By transposing Julien Freund's definition of the conflict as a life-or-death combat into the relevant organizational context,⁵ we will examine the clash between the ICP and *il manifesto* as a debate on the ultimate sense of the party itself. There were two competing interpretations of the same norm, which consisted of the party's whole immaterial patrimony: its ideal and ideological mindset, its tradition, its costumes, its collective memory, its statute. Despite the unequal resources of the contenders, this duel recalls less a political trial or a merely repressive action than an elaborated confrontation with unpredictable consequences. Therefore, the analysis of this process will finally consist of anatomizing the balance of power in the ICP through its subjective (actors, their strategies and languages) and organizational (bureaucracy and its working mechanisms) components.

I. Wrong Words in the Wrong Place at the Wrong Time

Our history begins in Rome in January 1966 at Pietro Ingrao's home, in a small and quiet street, via Ugo Balzani, in a neighborhood designed in the interwar period to host

³ Nello Ajello, *Il lungo addio. Intellettuali e PCI dal 1958 al 1991* (Roma; Bari: Laterza, 1997).

⁴ As to those aspects, see Antonio Lenzi, *Il Manifesto, tra dissenso e disciplina di partito. Origine e sviluppo di un gruppo politico nel PCI* (Reggio Calabria: Città del Sole, 2011).

⁵ See the definition of conflict proposed by Julien Freund, *Sociologie du conflit* (Paris: PUF, 1983), 65: "un affrontement ou heurt intentionnel entre deux êtres ou groupes de même espèce qui manifestent les uns à l'égard des autres une intention hostile, en général à propos d'un droit [...]" (a clash or intentional collision between two subjects or groups of the same typology, which express a hostile intention against each other typically as a matter of right).

middle-class public servants of the Fascist regime.⁶ Aged of 50, ICP activist since more than 25 years, former partisan and longtime director of the daily newspaper *l'Unità*, Ingrao was the youngest member of the party's Secretariat as well as member of the Direction and chief of the communist group at the Chamber of Deputies of the Italian Republican Parliament. It was nighttime, and Ingrao was redacting the intervention he would pronounce the following day at the 11th ICP's Congress. With him, was 33-year old Lucio Magri. Once a Christian Democrat, he got into the ICP in the late 1950s and started his quick rise to the party top, which made him leaving native Lombardy to move to Rome. Word by word, Ingrao and Magri accurately worked on their text which was completed around 2 a.m.⁷ It was a capital document, which explicitly proposed an unprecedented reform to be introduced in the ICP: the right to dissention. What did that mean actually?

The decisional process in the ICP had obeyed the rules of 'democratic centralism' until then.⁸ This formally allowed a fully open debate in the party but obliged members to strictly fulfill final assumptions acquired on the grounds of the prevailing will. Over time democratic centralism had eventually become the official cover for the communist authoritarian decisional style to be legitimized. In Stalin era, the theoretical bottom-up approach of democratic centralism was replaced by a strongly rigid system in which minority was cancelled, whilst final decisions and their implementation were the only relevant aspect. This trend was still substantially ongoing when Ingrao put his doubts at the forefront of the congress agenda. What he looked for was not to transform the ICP into a post-communist party featuring currents and related aspects of a liberal-democratic organization, but rather to retrieve the dialoguing ideal spirit of democratic centralism by giving visibility to minority positions. In other terms, Ingrao suggested that publicity of debates should show the whole genesis of party deliberations including marginal voices. These are the scandalous words that he pronounced during his congress speech, which shocked the party's leaders and were enthusiastically applauded by many delegates:

Comrade Longo has clearly expressed his criticisms and concerns as regards the publicity of the debate. I would not be honest if I said to you that I was persuaded.⁹

⁶ Eva Masini, *Piazza Bologna. Alle origini di un quartiere "borghese"* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2009). According to Ingrao, his father gave him that apartment in the mid-1950s in order to allow him to live independently with his wife and four sons: Antonio Galdo, *Pietro Ingrao. Il compagno disarmato* (Milano: Sperling&Kupfer, 2004), 2.

⁷ This episode is evoked by Ingrao in several autobiographical accounts and interviews. Among them: Pietro Ingrao, *Volevo la luna* (Torino: Einaudi, 2006), 313.

⁸ Michael Waller, *Democratic Centralism. An Historical Commentary* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981).

⁹ Original text: "Il compagno Longo ha espresso in modo molto netto le sue critiche e le sue preoccupazioni sulla questione della pubblicità del dibattito. Non sarei sincero se dicessi a voi che sono rimasto

Ingrao claimed for minorities to be acknowledged in the party's life because he recognized their existence as a matter of facts since several years. He himself was part of what one could label the ICP's leftist wing, yet bearing in mind that currents or wings were not admitted under the rules of democratic centralism. Ingrao and his supporters were careful observers of the ever-evolving socioeconomic Italian scene, which had experienced the economic boom a few years earlier and was going to live one of the longest cycles of protests of the global 1968. The leftist wing faced the traditional mentality of an establishment whose front-man was Giorgio Amendola, embodying the instinct for *Realpolitik* and the search for institutional national power so typical of a communist party. That rivalry had been accentuated by general secretary Palmiro Togliatti's death in 1964. His successor Luigi Longo was unable to inverse the negative trends the ICP was suffering in terms of number of members, newcomers, votes, since the mid-1950s.¹⁰ Moreover, the governmental alliance between the Christian Democracy and the Italian Socialist Party isolated the ICP and made urgent a strategic relaunch.

Due to its innovative charge, Ingrao's position unsurprisingly was appreciated by a restricted but influent network of young permanent functionaries with a strong intellectual background: Massimo Caprara, Luciana Castellina, Aldo Natoli, Luigi Pintor, Valentino Parlato, Rossana Rossanda, Ninetta Zandegiacomi, and the aforementioned Lucio Magri. They were all born between the twenties and the early thirties, except for Aldo Natoli (b. 1913). Besides this generational link and despite their heterogeneous individual trajectories as well as unequal hierarchical roles, they shared some ideological points: the rejection of Soviet hegemony on global communism; sympathy for Maoist China; a strong sensibility for civil society evolution; criticisms on the ICP's organizational setting.

Apart from that small group, 15% to 20% of the party permanent staff may be considered as close to Ingrao's views at that time.¹¹ This was a significant amount that so far had represented a well-known but silent presence in the rituals of a party in which unity was a priority goal as to self-representation. Ingrao's initiative made this tolerated coexistence unacceptable insofar words of dissent got out from the circumscribed leading bodies (Direction, Secretariat, and the Political bureau), thus becoming public. Moreover, they gained a tangible consensus among the congress audience, which was

persuasivo", *XI Congresso del partito comunista italiano. Atti e risoluzioni* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1966), 254-266, quotation at 265.

¹⁰ *Il Partito comunista italiano. Struttura e storia dell'organizzazione, 1921-1979*, "Annali della Fondazione Gian Giacomo Feltrinelli", XXI (1981), ed. by Massimo Ilardi and Aris Accornero (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1982).

¹¹ Grant Amyot, *The Italian Communist Party. The Crisis of the Popular Front Strategy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 157.

proof of their actual danger. In the same day of his talk, January 27th, Ingrao was judged by his comrades and was about to lose his post in the party's direction. It was mostly thanks to general secretary Luigi Longo, who aimed at prudently handling the contrast, that he could be rescued from being punished through the worst disciplinary measure for an exponent of the ICP's leading group. Nevertheless, his closest allies were hit by a soft reappraisal tending to put them aside from the party's main core: they were either moved to peripheral destinations or deprived of their major responsibilities.¹²

While the marginalization of Ingrao and his friends was accomplished, an organizational reform of party bureaucracy was carried out in order to slightly decentralize the decisional process. This formal achievement was balanced by the substantial improvement of the establishment, in which an alliance between Longo and Amendola was made in order to discourage further possible threats to the party's unity. The antagonistic relationship between Ingrao and Amendola was temporarily under control, but major issues were about to create a suitable field outside the party for new antagonisms to upset the apparently still climate within it. Among them, three were particularly pressing: the juvenile insurgency of 1968 in Italy and abroad; the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in the same year; the geopolitical and ideological competition opposing USSR and China.¹³

With regard to all those topics, the ICP's approach was all but blindly assertive. The party was relatively open towards protesting students' reasons, explicitly disapproved Moscow military intervention, and took a balanced stance as to the rising rivalry between the two communist superpowers. Far less cautiously, Rossanda and her friends were immersed in the exciting spirit of 1968,¹⁴ supported its main actors on both sides of the Iron Curtain, and looked at China as the new sanctuary of proletarian revolution. This interpretative distance will soon turn into an unbridgeable fracture. What will make this possible?

II. Words of War...

Late 1968, Longo's precarious health pushed him to designate his successor to lead the party. The chosen one was Enrico Berlinguer, who had coherently maintained a

¹² Galdo, *Pietro Ingrao*, 64-75.

¹³ Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of 1968. Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956-1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁴ Lucio Magri, *Considerazioni sui fatti di maggio* (Bari: De Donato, 1968); Rossana Rossanda, *L'anno degli studenti* (Bari: De Donato, 1968).

neutral position in the longstanding antagonism between Ingrao and Amendola, and therefore was the ideal personality to guide the ICP out from that risky confrontation. A further consideration contributed to his good fortune. Berlinguer was born in 1922 and joined the party in 1943, thus representing a younger generation compared to that of the founding fathers and their direct heirs – for example Palmiro Togliatti (b. 1893), Longo (b. 1900) or Amendola (b. 1907). This aspect was meant to play a crucial role in the ICP challenging adaptation process to the Italian post-economic boom society and its related sociopolitical features.

The wind of change embodied by Berlinguer was mirrored by the conciliatory mood introducing and marking the 12th ICP's Congress in February 1969.¹⁵ Rossanda, Natoli and Pintor were even admitted into the Central committee (CC):¹⁶ this stressed the appeasing interaction between the establishment and Pietro Ingrao, who had renounced in his turn to any polemical attitude. But when peace seemed definitely restored, a new challenge came to transform latent antagonism into a wide conflict.¹⁷

The mobilization of the ICP's leftist wing dates back to the weeks immediately following the congress. It was then that Rossanda and Magri started to implement an old and never actualized project: creating their own periodical. After envisaging a somewhat Machiavellian title – the Prince¹⁸ – they finally opted for an homage to the communist manifesto of 1848. Perception of the inconvenience that this initiative could cause to the ICP pushed several major publishing houses – Einaudi, Feltrinelli, and Laterza – to reject Rossanda and Magri's request for taking care of their upcoming creature. That is why they finally (and successfully) addressed a minor publisher in Bari, Raimondo Coga, whose company, Dedalo, was known for its unconventionally leftist catalogue.

It was only after having signed a contract with Coga in early April 1969 that Rossanda started an informal tour to let the party know about her and her friends' project. What kind of reactions did she expect? Certainly she was aware that the statute did not explicitly forbid the creation of newspapers or reviews. On the other hand, she could not ignore that in the communist tradition such unauthorized voices were utterly outside the party customs. Or better said: against. When preparing her meeting with Berlinguer

¹⁵ Fulco Lancaster, "I delegati ai congressi nazionali", *Il Partito comunista italiano*, 619-672.

¹⁶ The composition of the ICP's leading bodies elected at the 12th congress is in PCI, *XIII congresso del PCI. Documenti politici dal XII al XIII congresso* (Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1972), 15-21. See also Chiara Sebastiani, "Organi dirigenti nazionali. Composizione, meccanismi di formazione e di evoluzione. 1945/1979", *Il Partito comunista italiano*, 387-444.

¹⁷ On conflictive dynamics from a sociological standpoint, see Jacques Beauchard, *La dynamique conflictuelle. Comprendre et conduire les conflits* (Paris: Éditions Réseaux, 1981).

¹⁸ Magri's idea was to label the periodical *Il Principe*. See Aldo Garzia, *Da Natta a Natta. Storia del Manifesto e del PdUP* (Bari: Dedalo, 1985), 30.

she was therefore very likely to predict what feedback she was going to receive. Do not do that, was the sense of the chief's words the day of their encounter. "They will kick you out of the party" (*Vi cacceranno*),¹⁹ predicted Ingrao some time later on the grounds of his long-time militant career and his short but intense experience as a political deviant.

When Ingrao had dared to defy the party habits in 1966, his challenging words had been limited both in space and time, and his provoking behavior had soon turned into a trustworthy collaborative attitude. His rebellion had been forgivable, after all: an understandable temporary weakness in the precarious balance of a party searching for a new stable *status quo*. In the case of *il manifesto* things were deeply different. Press is by definition a vehicle for opinions to become public, and control of militant press and propaganda had been a crucial point in the ICP. From this standpoint, nothing could be more unfair than creating an unauthorized new periodical, despite its ostensibly cultural goals. All the more so that the proposal involved three CC permanent functionaries, namely Rossanda, Natoli, and Pintor.

The ICP Direction met in early May 1969 to take a position on the topic. The taboo words "fraction" (*frazione*) and "fractionist" (*frazionista*), Leninist evil of democratic centralism, were introduced into the debate by several speakers, especially Luigi Longo. According to Armando Cossutta, an "absolute indiscipline" (*è l'indisciplina in assoluto*) was at stake, and therefore a lack of proper and immediate stigmatization was going to damage the very communist identity: "we will not be the ICP anymore" (*allora non siamo più il PCI*). During the meeting, the only effective dilemma in question seemed to be whether the party's blame would precede or follow the first issue of *il manifesto*, which had been scheduled by the end of June.²⁰

For the moment, further encounters with dissidents were envisaged as well as a press release, in which the chosen adjective defining their unwelcomed initiative was not yet "fractionist" but "personal" (*personale*): a slightly less heavy condemnation that intended to stress an inappropriate but forgivable offense to the party unity.²¹ Two days later, Rossanda wrote an open letter to the board. Far from threatening the party, she and her friends felt themselves, she wrote, as the most genuine expression of communist history, culture, and militancy, on which ground they were going to carry on their plan.²²

Together with her open letter, Rossanda wrote some private lines to Berlinguer, in which she thanked him for "his simplicity, his clarity and even his kindness in listening"

¹⁹ Rossana Rossanda, *La ragazza del secolo scorso* (Torino: Einaudi, 2005), 374.

²⁰ Archive of the ICP (hereinafter AICP), Direction, MF 006, file 20, meeting of 7-8 May 1969.

²¹ "Comunicato dell'Ufficio stampa della Direzione del PCI", *l'Unità* (15 May 1969), 3.

²² AICP, CC's permanent commissions, 1969, 5th commission and Dossier Manifesto, MF 0305, letter of Rossanda to Berlinguer and Natta, 17 May 1969.

to her (*la semplicità, la chiarezza e anche la cortesia con la quale hai voluto ascoltarmi*). This was an apparently minor but actually meaningful symptom of future general secretary emotional sensibility, which was unusual for the ICP communicational standards and was able to introduce an innovative approach to its culture and rituals. The personal interactions between contenders, particularly Rossanda and Berlinguer, went on providing an empathic counterpoint to the colder political-administrative procedure. As to this, the growing antagonism was assuming the bipolarized set-up that issued into a conflict, in which two less and less reconcilable visions of the same rules were confronting with each other. Words of war had led contenders to this. A war of words was going to make their paths irredeemably divergent.

III ...War of Words

The reputation of *il manifesto* preceded its appearance as many subscriptions were made even before its first issue was sold in newsstands – 40,000 to 50,000 copies, which represented a largely unexpected success. The problem was how to handle all this, on both sides of the barricade. Moreover, a further threat to unity and stability was worsening an already difficult transition. In the same weeks a book had been published by Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, a communist activist since the Resistance and former director of some major ICP periodicals such as *Vie Nuove* and the female weekly magazine *Noi Donne*. She had been successfully candidate in Naples constituency at the general election of May 1968, and had carried out a sort of sociological-narrative account on her campaign consisting of a long correspondence with French philosopher Louis Althusser.²³ Her criticisms of the ICP conduct in the socio-economically underdeveloped Neapolitan area, her ideologically unconventional sympathies – namely for Maoist China – as well as her irreverent tone were all reasons for her book not to pass unnoticed. Once again, words that should have kept private became public, thus attracting the ICP's concern.²⁴

The “fractionist” character of *il manifesto* was by now unanimously acknowledged by the Direction.²⁵ This was also due to the fact that the war of words declared by the dissidents was accompanied by several initiatives such as press conferences and meet-

²³ Maria Antonietta Macciocchi, *Lettere dall'interno del PCI a Louis Althusser* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1969).

²⁴ “Lo stato del Partito a quattro mesi dal XII Congresso. Un'analisi della Commissione di organizzazione del CC”, *l'Unità* (16 June 1969), 3.

²⁵ AICP, Direction, MF 006, file 23, meeting of 2 July 1969.

ings to publicize the journal. An immediate punishment was considered as suitable by some leaders, such as Cossutta, Gerardo Chiaromonte, Arturo Colombi, and Agostino Novella. In their interventions, the conviction emerged that a prompt and ruthless reaction was necessary to reassure the party as to its own strength.

On the other hand, most of the Direction members stressed the opposite risk. *il manifesto* had a large audience both inside and outside the party. Punishment would have martyred their initiators, with a predictable advantage for them in terms of followers. Not to mention the consequences this would have caused on the national and international relationships of the ICP, which was trying to rejuvenate its own old-fashioned image by self-representing as less traditionalist and less Moscow-addicted – as the international conference of communist parties held in June 1969 had actually shown. Once more, Ingrao caught the deeper sense of what was at stake. “New generations”, he said, “are not persuaded by our notion of unity, of discipline” (*generazioni nuove che non sono conquistate alla nostra concezione dell’unità, della disciplina*). Trying to conquer them was a major goal, and repression of the dissidents was certainly not going to help. Were the dissidents “failing comrades” (*compagni che sbagliano*) or “enemies to fight” (*nemici da combattere*)?²⁶

Following the meeting, an article signed by Paolo Bufalini in the ICP’s weekly *Rinascita* mirrored the overall hesitating strategy of the establishment.²⁷ At least one thing was clear either. Talks with Rossanda and his friends had to be pursued. On their side of the battlefield, diversified attitudes were emerging. Aldo Natoli seemed to be the most available for a possible compromise; Lucio Magri and Luigi Pintor, on the contrary, were rigid defenders, so they appeared, of their own camp. Ideological reference of her group, Rossanda played a leading role in it. Through personal separate contacts with each of them, the establishment counted on the beneficial effects of the ancient maxim *divide et impera* in order to weaken the adverse front and to beat it without facing it as a whole in the open field.

In July 1969, the second issue of *il manifesto* triggered an extension of the debate to the ICP’s regional executive bodies, especially where dissidents were gaining consensus – for example in Latium, namely in Rome, and in Campania, particularly in Naples. Letters of grassroots militants in those weeks and a collective appeal of many intellectuals – including actors, directors, architects, political thinkers²⁸ – to meet Berlinguer and get clarifications testify of the widespread concerns on the capacity of the party to solve

²⁶ AICP, Direction, MF 006, file 23, meeting of 2 July 1969.

²⁷ Paolo Bufalini, “Su una nuova rivista”, *Rinascita*, 27 (4 July 1969), 8-9.

²⁸ AICP, CC’s permanent commissions, 1969, 5th commission and Dossier Manifesto, MF 0305.

its internal crises. The administrative handling of the *affaire* became a priority subject, on which depended most of its possible disciplinary outcome.

An unprecedented set-up was chosen aiming at excluding two bodies that for different reasons did not fulfill current requested features: the CC, which was pretty large (171 members) and not sufficiently confidential; and the Central Committee for Control (CCC), which was responsible for disciplinary issues. Their involvement, which was sanctioned by the statute in such circumstances, was claimed by the most orthodox, strongly keen not to depart from the party's formal norms. Despite this minority opposition, a third body was therefore addressed, that is the CC's fifth permanent commission (CC5).²⁹ It guaranteed what the majority of the Direction had been looking for: a small and politically reliable audience not institutionally charged of disciplinary duties.

Created in 1966 to deal with organizational matters, the CC5 included 36 members among whom Luigi Pintor. In order to stress the Direction's good intentions towards him and his friends, Rossanda and Natoli as well were allowed to attend the CC5 upcoming meetings. In the meanwhile, Berlinguer's negotiating words went on marking the informal encounters between the generals of the two fronts. Rossanda's attitude, in Berlinguer's view, could be still acceptable as to the party uses. But at the same time, occasional skirmishes between the respective troops through press articles and reciprocal minor attacks made clear that the overall mood of the conflict was certainly not bound to distension.

Nevertheless, minor but evident signs of evolution were emerging. In mid-July, Aldo Tortorella let the Political bureau know about his personal concern regarding his wife's, Lia Cigarini, contribution to *il manifesto*: an article on female emancipation in the journal's second issue. Tortorella's long letter features stylistic elements of the autobiographical accounts that communist militants were meant to provide the party in order to make themselves controllable, according to a Soviet usage imported in the interwar ICP by those who came back from long stays in the USSR.³⁰ The letter also includes some self-criticisms together with words aiming at stressing how reliable actually was the comrade concerned, Lia Cigarini, despite the recent fall into the wrong side of the ongoing conflict. What would have probably implied some sort of disciplinary measure just a few years earlier was quickly solved by the reassuring formula: "it is considered

²⁹ AICP, Direction, MF 006, file 27, meeting of 28 July 1969.

³⁰ Mauro Boarelli, *La fabbrica del passato. Autobiografie di militanti comunisti (1945-1956)* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2007); Claude Pennetier and Bernard Pudal, *Autobiographies, autocritiques, aveux dans le monde communiste* (Paris: Belin, 2002).

that the question raised by Tortorella does not exist” (*si ritiene che il problema posto da Tortorella non esista*).³¹

In mid-September, *il manifesto* published an article on the Czechoslovak crisis that brought Soviet tanks invading the undisciplined “popular democracy”. “Prague is alone” (*Praga è sola*) was its title, which deliberately seemed to undermine the courageous disapproval the ICP dared to express toward Moscow repression. A response from via delle Botteghe Oscure – where the ICP’s HQ in Rome were located – was unavoidable. Predictably, the anti-*manifesto* counterattack was entrusted to Aldo Tortorella.³² By doing this, the managing group sought to stress its unity through the signature of a personality whose position was weakened because of political-personal reasons. Closing a long article on the “Czechoslovak events” (*questione cecoslovacca*), a post-scriptum blamed the “irresponsible superficiality” (*irresponsabile leggerezza*) of *il manifesto* regarding the “right conception of internationalist relations” (*corretta concezione dei rapporti internazionalisti*). Its advocacy for breaking links with the socialist world was “objectively” (*oggettivamente*) contributing to reinforce the position of “moderate and conservative forces” (*forze moderate e conservatrici*) on the Italian political scene.³³

This time, the ICP’s was not the only reply attracted by its iconoclastic leftist wing. Words of war arrived from the USSR as well, which informed the Italian comrades about its bad intentions. Should *il manifesto* went on threatening the ICP, Moscow would create an ultra-orthodox journal and cut down funding for Botteghe Oscure.³⁴ Interestingly, *il manifesto* was supposed to let its highest representative, namely Rossanda, to share classified information concerning the international relations of the ICP with the ‘bourgeois’ press.³⁵ The geographical enlargement of the *affaire* might have influenced its development in terms of lexical battles between the party establishment and its opponents. A further recrudescence was logical, with consequences that were going to trespass the fine line between regaining and reproving dissidents.

³¹ AICP, political bureau (PB), MF 006, file 37, meeting of 22 July 1969.

³² AICP, PB, MF 006, file 37, meeting of 30 September 1969.

³³ Aldo Tortorella, “Democrazia socialista e questione nazionale. Il dibattito sui problemi del movimento operaio internazionale”, *Rinascita*, 39 (3 October 1969), 8-9.

³⁴ Massimo Caprara, *Quando le Botteghe erano Oscure, 1944-1969* (Milano: Saggiatore, 1997), 222. Actually, the ICP attitude with respect to the Soviet invasion of Tchechoslovakia had already implied a funding cut by Moscow in 1969: Valerio Riva and Francesco Bigazzi (Milano: Mondadori, 1999), 47, 56, 371.

³⁵ AICP, Enrico Berlinguer fund, inner political affairs, box 4, MF 94, 2519, report by Mauro Galleni for the secretariat, 16 June 1969; letter from Renato Sandri to Mauro Galleni and Salvatore Cacciapuoti, Rome, 25 June 1969; letter from Arturo Colombi to Luigi Longo, Rome, 21 July 1969.

IV. Forbidden Words, Forgotten Friends

In the view of some perceptive observers, the frightening ghost of the “*langue de bois*” – meaning the bureaucratic conformist unexpressive idiom of average communist nomenclatura³⁶ – seemed to persist in the party ranks as symptom of their incapacity to catch the very sense of *il manifesto* protest. So wrote a militant in a letter to both contenders in which he compared the “personal, clear, and spontaneous language” (*linguaggio personale, chiaro e spontaneo*) of the minority press, coming from a “genuine and non-superficial thought” (*un travaglio di pensiero autentico e non epidermico*) and a “real search for truth” (*una ricerca sincera della verità*), and, on the other hand, “a sort of preformed language” (*certo linguaggio performato*) – a language that reminded “Counter-Reformation” or maybe “rhetoric schools of Imperial Rome, when people had nothing new to say anymore...”.³⁷

Actually, a detectable linguistic divide between the two fronts, if any, seems to be less in their respective official communicational platforms than in their informal exchanges, including frequent encounters and private letters. In fact, those of *il manifesto* were fully products of the ICP’s political culture, and their language, although carrying unorthodox contents, was not altering structure and forms of the party language. Metaphorically speaking, if their weapons did not feature the same caliber of those of the party establishment’s and their troops were far less numerous, certainly both the weapon factory and the military training camp had been the same for the two contenders. The thing is that friendly fire was becoming unacceptable by the major target, whose reaction was simply a matter of time.

Early October, Rossanda, Pintor, and Natoli attended the CC5 three-day meeting in which their and their allies’ party membership was bitterly discussed.³⁸ The debate

³⁶ The label “*langue de bois*” is currently used to define a number of standardized communicational styles within and outside the world of politics, in which it has been traditionally employed by analysts as a sort of surrogate for Orwellian newspeak (*novlangue*). For some reflection on the historical development of the “*langue de bois*” concept, see: “Les langues de bois”, *Hermès. La revue*, 58, III – “Pratiques et limites du décodage” (2010); Christian Delporte, *Une histoire de la langue de bois* (Paris: Flammarion, 2009); Françoise Thom, *La langue de bois* (Paris: Julliard, 1987). A comparative study on newspeak and languages of totalitarian regimes is John Wesley Young, *Orwell’s Newspeak and Totalitarian Language. Its Nazi and Communist Antecedents* (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 1991).

³⁷ Original text: “quel linguaggio che fa tanto pensare alla Controriforma o nel migliore dei casi alle scuole di retorica, fiorite a Roma nel periodo imperiale, quando cioè certa gente non aveva più nulla di nuovo da dire...”. AICP, CC’s permanent commissions, 1969, 5th commission and Dossier Manifesto, MF 0305, letter from Gianni Bonotto to “Rinascita” and to *il manifesto*, Sacile (Pordenone), 28 July 1969.

³⁸ AICP, CC’s permanent commissions, 1969, 5th commission and Dossier Manifesto, MF 0305, 5CC meeting of 2 and 9-10 October 1969.

was introduced by Alessandro Natta who accused the dissidents to be a “political group” (*raggruppamento politico*) working against the ICP’s “fundamentals” and “legitimacy” as well as its international alliances.³⁹ Hence, the “compatibility” (*compatibilità*) of the minority leading representatives with their militant status was to be assessed. A barrage fire of interventions followed in which the three exponents of *Il manifesto* had to face a series of accusations: to embody a “fraction”, to be “against the party” or keen to “destroy it” (*sfasciare*), or even to give a bad example with possible dangerous repercussions on the communist movement as a whole.

Except for some isolated voices, as for instance 28-year old Claudio Petruccioli, the speakers were overall convinced of the “incompatibility” between the party and *il manifesto*, whose only suitable exit strategy was renouncing to its own battle. As to the tone of the debate, this reached unusually dramatic peaks with strongly different counter-attack strategies in the established front going from impeccable old-fashioned orthodoxy to pathetic paternalism. On the one hand, Cossutta retrieved some vintage labels drawn from a long-standing anti-reformist tradition. According to him, *il manifesto* had a “pre-Leninist” vision, a definitely rightist approach reminding Giuseppe Saragat, longtime chief of the temporarily dissolved Italian Democratic Socialist Party and current President of the Republic. On the other hand, Salvatore Cacciapuoti condensed in a few words the very epitome of communist ethics by saying:

How could a militant exclusively listen to his own conscience. Who of us has been always agreeing or does not deem he has been suffering some injustices? Yet nobody has ever lifted a finger against the party. This is not an outdated conception but rather the way a communist militant should behave.⁴⁰

Openly acknowledging that disagreement or even a sense of unfairness was common experience of any militant, Cacciapuoti highlighted one crucial point: the challenge of being communist did not consist of adhering to the party mindset blindly, but rather of systematically backing the party *despite* and *beyond* discrepancies between one’s own individuality and the party itself. Natoli’s reply implicitly agreed on Cacciapuoti’s point and relaunched:

³⁹ Original text: “Siamo dinanzi ad una contestazione della linea del partito, nei suoi fondamenti politici, e della sua legittimità”.

⁴⁰ Original text: “Ma come può un militante ascoltare solo la propria coscienza? Chi di noi è stato sempre d’accordo, o non pensa di aver ricevuto dei torti? Ma nessuno mai ha mosso un dito contro il Partito. Questa non è una concezione arretrata, è il modo di comportarsi di un militante comunista”.

We are aware that *il manifesto* is something abnormal, incompatible as you put it, with certain rules of the game. The question is, therefore, to check the setting and rules of the game that make this initiative abnormal. It is mystifying that setting and rules should be untouchable⁴¹

namely an ‘idol’ to obey to. Such a radical contrast was still not sufficient to imply the disciplinary reaction that would have been predictable in the first place. A further debate was engaged on what kind of “incompatibility” was at stake:⁴² did it involve the party strategy or the party *tout court*? In the first case, it was a political incompatibility which did not request, according to Paolo Bufalini and others, an administrative punishment. The distinction was so subtle, and somewhat captious, that even Natoli felt perplexed: if there was “fractionism”, like most of the attendants thought, *il manifesto* had to be punished; if not, like he and his friends deemed, so why talking about “incompatibility”? Moving the debate into a kind of philosophical stage, Giuliano Pajetta managed to save both the (private) right to dissent and the (verbal) blame for it by distinguishing: “incompatible are not the ideas, but rather the deeds that come from” (*Incompatibili non sono le idee, ma gli atti che ne seguono*).

Having attained its conceptual climax, the meeting was concluded by a vote that approved unanimously, except Pintor, the introductory paper by Alessandro Natta. Together with Bufalini, he was designated as responsible for editing the text, which was then submitted to the Direction. An armistice was still possible, said the resolution, but those of *il manifesto* were operating against the party, hence an “objective incompatibility” between them and their status of communist militants and, *a fortiori*, leaders had to be handled. Further discussions were therefore envisaged between the party and the minority.

The Direction, in its turn,⁴³ sent the dossier to the CC and the CCC, which had a joint meeting. In compliance with their disciplinary tasks, especially as to the CCC, a decision was taken about the “fractionist” character of the dissidence. Rossanda, Natoli, and Pintor voted against, whereas three others abstained.⁴⁴ This formal condemnation was balanced by an unusual proposal: publishing entirely the meeting proceedings and opening the debate to the party as a whole, including local sections. The related book

⁴¹ Original text: “Ci rendiamo conto che la iniziativa del Manifesto è cosa abnorme, se volete incompatibile, con certe regole del gioco. Il problema, allora, è di verificare il modello, le regole del gioco di fronte al quale (!) questa iniziativa è abnorme. È cosa mistificante ammettere che modello e regole siano intoccabili”.

⁴² AICP, CC’s permanent commissions, 1969, 5th commission and Dossier Manifesto, MF 0305, 5CC meeting, 14 October 1969.

⁴³ AICP, Direction, MF 006, file 31, meeting of 13 October.

⁴⁴ The three abstained were Giuseppe Chiarante, Lucio Lombardo Radice and Sergio Garavini. Cesare Luporini, who did not take part into the poll, sent a letter to the party saying he would have abstained if present. The three opponents were obviously Natoli, Pintor et Rossanda.

was edited by a publishing house controlled by the ICP and had strong circulation in the party milieus.⁴⁵

Ingrao's dream – making visible the internal decisional process with all its zigzagged paths – was coming true? Apparently. But would this be sufficient to prevent *il manifesto* from going on with its aggressive attitude? Definitely not. A detailed suggestion made by Rossanda to reform circulation of ideas within the party was far from being appreciated by the establishment,⁴⁶ while news from federations made Botteghe Oscure aware of how extended the dissidence was.⁴⁷ The fifth issue of *il manifesto* can be seen as a point of no return.⁴⁸ In the following Direction meeting, the word “enemies” (*nemici*) was randomly employed to label those who went on using forbidden words and therefore had condemned themselves to become forgotten friends.⁴⁹

V. How to Say ‘Peace’

The day when the CC convened to define the disciplinary measures admittedly considered as unavoidable, the formal treatment of the case interwove with its interpersonal dimension just in front of the meeting room. It was there that Berlinguer met Rossanda for a couple of minutes. Making a last attempt to avoid her traumatic exit, Berlinguer asked her a sign of “fidelity” (*fedeltà*); she answered this would be rather a sign of “obedience” (*obbedienza*).⁵⁰ The three dissidents in the CC were expelled through an administrative measure (*radiazione*) that did not feature any moral reprobation, like standard expulsions normally did. Six voted against, including those directly concerned, and three abstained. Ingrao approved the expulsion, but deeply regretted his choice years after.⁵¹

The cases of those – Magri, Caprara, Castellina, Parlato – who were not members of the CC were dealt with in the following months according to their status, while the small parliamentary contingent of *il manifesto* was admitted into the mixed group at

⁴⁵ AICP, miscellaneous institutes and organisms, 1969, MF 0307, 2519, letter from the commercial direction of the Editori Riuniti to the ICP direction, Rome, 26 November 1969. At that time, the amount of edited copies was around 1,200.

⁴⁶ AICP, Enrico Berlinguer fund, MF 94, letter from Rossanda to Berlinguer, 28 October 1969.

⁴⁷ AICP, Direction, MF 006, file 32, meeting of 5 November 1969.

⁴⁸ “Sul Manifesto”, *il manifesto*, 5-6 (October-November, 1969), 3-5.

⁴⁹ AICP, Direction, MF 006, fasc. 33, meeting of 11 November. “Comunicato della Direzione del PCI sul ‘manifesto’”, *l’Unità* (12 November 1969), 1.

⁵⁰ Rossanda, *La ragazza del secolo scorso*, 384.

⁵¹ Ingrao, *Volevo la luna*, 316-317.

the Chamber of Deputies. In the meanwhile, local meetings showed that the minority had gained most of its audience in large cities and in the center and northern regions. The related debates attracted 10% to 15% of the overall militants, which amounted to 1,500,000 at the time. Considering that *il manifesto* featured in total some hundreds of active supporters and some thousands of sympathizers, it is easy to catch the disproportion between its numerical weight and the influence it played into the ICP's sociability as well as in the national political scene.

il manifesto did not conquer the very traditionalist core of the party, which could not appreciate its theoretical approach, its irreverence towards hierarchies and most of all its challenging attitude towards the ICP's international alliances. Pure working class representatives felt a huge distance with the dissident leaders, and a wave of anti-intellectualism arose against people who were maybe experts on writing and complaining, but certainly not on hard-working and preparing the proletarian revolution:

Instead of blathering they should go to hard work twelve hours a day as I do, so that their strange ideas would be washed away unless they received a good tip from some liberals for betraying the Italian proletariat. Workers like me, who are directly exploited by capitalism, are still patient, so why they want to change the Party given that they don't actually slog at either the assembly line or in the fields?⁵²

The main areas of consent of *il manifesto* included the territories where its leaders came from – especially Bergamo, Rome, and Naples – plus some major provinces such as Genoa, Cagliari, and later Salerno, as well as isolated support all over the country.⁵³ In the city capital, the Montesacro section was the one where dissidents had the largest audience. Paolo Spriano, the well-known party intellectual who had published two years before the first volume of his monumental history of the ICP, was invited there for a talk on an apparent inoffensive topic: Palmiro Togliatti and Leninism. Right before he began some attendants started reading a protest document rudely stigmatizing the disciplinary measures adopted against *il manifesto*. This caused a lively discussion that was about to degenerate into a physical clash. Only after one hour an improvised poll was carried out

⁵² Original text: “Se invece di blaterare andassero a sgobbare dodici ore al giorno come faccio io gli passerebbero i grilli per la testa, a meno che non abbiano intascato una buona mancia da qualche liberale per tradire il proletariato italiano. Ma se abbiamo pazienza noi scarpa grossa che siamo gli sfruttati diretti del capitale, quelli lì che non sgobbano materialmente alle macchine o ai campi perché vogliono cambiare il Partito?”, in AICP, 1969, Lombardia Region, Mantova, MF 0306, letter from Massimo Gozzi, secretary of the Cicognara section, to the ICP direction, Cicognara, 24 November 1969.

⁵³ AICP, CC's permanent commissions, 1969, 5th commission and Dossier Manifesto, MF 0305, meeting of 24 November, “La ‘questione’ del Manifesto (nota sul dibattito che si è svolto sui lavori del CC e della CCC)”.

allowing Spriano to finally make his talk, which was followed by further tough verbal confrontations until the night.⁵⁴

Apart from this borderline case, the abundant documentation referring to regional and provincial bodies proves that the debate was large and vibrant. Yet from a practical point of view, distribution and availability of *il manifesto* were sensibly dishomogeneous. Hence, the quality and quantity of local debates strongly varied according to the circulation of the journal issues in every single province. Furthermore, certain tiredness and evasiveness are perceivable in some local reports. This is maybe symptom of some reluctance to stimulate debate on issues that were not always rooted in the territory concerned. After all, Botteghe Oscure got a general positive feedback for its overall strategy but not unanimous approval.

The disciplinary conclusion of the *affaire* gave rise to criticisms even among those who did not explicitly back the dissidence.⁵⁵ On the other hand, an ultra-orthodox minority would have liked a more rapid and severe solution. Even occasional collaboration with *il manifesto* could appear a heavy mistake to be blamed, the targeted activist being obliged to justify his initiative and to beg the party's pardon for that – as occurred in Siena to Enrico Berlinguer's cousin, Luigi. Broadly speaking, *il manifesto* put strain on the very self-perception of the ICP, pushing it into a sort of collective conflict in which its entire political culture was actually at stake. As usual after any war peace followed, but contenders and the battlefield could not stand unchanged.

VI. Conclusion

Despite the lack of resources and its organizational weakness, *il manifesto* managed to survive representing a highly authoritative voice of the European Left in the seventies. It was transformed into a daily newspaper in 1971 and into a political movement which merged over time with other numerically small but intellectually influent actors of the Italian Left. Some of the protagonists of the 1969 conflict, such as Magri and Castellina, worked their coming back to the ICP in the eighties, while others went on working at *il manifesto*, such as Pintor, Rossanda, and Parlato. Those last two quit in 2012 because of political clashes with the majority, in a kind of historic recurrence of their exit more than forty years before.

⁵⁴ AICP, 1969, Lazio Region, Rome, MF 0307, 1056-1420, January-December 1969, letter from Paolo Spriano to Armando Cossutta, Rome, 29 November 1969.

⁵⁵ AICP, 1969 and 1970, Regions and Provinces, MF 0306-0307 and MF 069.

The conflicting dynamics involving *il manifesto* and the ICP is relevant because of several original aspects regarding the treatment of dissidence. First of all the communicational strategy based on interpersonal exchanges, which was not brand new in the communist tradition, but in 1969 continuously accompanied the political-administrative handling as a sort of counterpoint of the formal side of the *affaire*. Trying to persuade the dissidents not to persist in making mistakes was a statutory norm and a priority goal for recovering opposition, but this time the formal rule was actualized with unprecedented effectiveness. This negotiating mood is also present in the bureaucratic process, in which it is detectable an evolution from a punitive repressive model into a more rational dialoguing interaction with the dissidents.

The publication of the mid-October CC meeting proceedings in a book and the launch of a large debate all through the party are both signs of an innovative exit strategy from such kind of conflict. Albeit the debate was meant to be controlled by trustworthy functionaries, it was nevertheless a risky way to open the internal decisional mechanisms to public assessment within and outside the party. At the same time, it was also a useful tool to measure the extent of the dissidence in the periphery of the party itself. Not by chance, further disciplinary deliberations were taken against the supporters of *il manifesto* over the following months.

Various factors explain what occurred. Generally speaking, trends of the Italian and international political life pushed the ICP to weaken its link with Moscow in order to make itself compatible with governmental responsibilities at the national level. Furthermore, “the spirit of ’68” that had pervaded to some extent the ICP, as well as the hierarchical and biographical background of the dissidents forced the establishment to adopt a cautious behavior. In the meanwhile, the so-called ‘Hot Autumn’ in 1969 and the upcoming terrorist massacre of piazza Fontana in Milan, in December 12th the same year, provided a troubling framework that emphasizes by contrast the importance that *il manifesto* played in the party life in those same months.

The final outcome of the conflict, including its punishing epilogue, made all the evolving process described above less visible and valuable. The expulsion of the dissidents confirmed the suspects of those who thought the ICP was still an illiberal and fundamentally antidemocratic party, while reassuring Moscow, where the case was attentively monitored. As a matter of fact the international ties between the Italian communists and the USSR will continue representing an unavoidable pillar of the ICP’s political culture, marking its organizational and ideological profile. Yet this was not an insurmountable obstacle for the party to adapt itself to the new challenges of the seventies, when it got its electoral best outcomes and became a credible example of communism well-suited for the affluent Western society.